

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0865

EXDIS

NOFORN

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE, IS, US
SUBJECT: POSSIBLE USE OF UN FORCES IN SOUTH LEBANON

REF: (A) 76 BEIRUT 8605, (B) 76 STATE 290622

1. IN THE COURSE OF A TOUR D'HORIZON WITH FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS ON FEB 28, WE DISCUSSED THE PROBLEM OF THE SOUTH, WHICH BOUTROS DESCRIBED AS NO. 1 PROBLEM IN LEBANON TODAY. HE SAID LATEST REPORTS INDICATED THAT FROM 50,000-100,000 PEOPLE HAVE LEFT THE AREA BECAUSE OF THE FIGHTING IN RECENT WEEKS AND ARE SEEKING REFUGE IN TYRE, SIDON AND BEIRUT. PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER KAMAL ASSAD HAD ASKED HIM TO BRIEF SELECTED DEPUTIES THE NEXT DAY AND POLITICAL PERSONALITIES FROM ALL OVER THE SPECTRUM HAD BEEN MAKING SUGGESTIONS ON WHAT SHOULD BE DONE. ONE IDEA THAT HAD BEEN MENTIONED BY SAEB SALAM, AMONG OTHERS, AND WIDELY REPORTED IN THE PRESS, WAS THE POSSIBILITY OF USING UN TROOPS IN THE SOUTH. ISRAELI FONMIN ALLON APPARENTLY HAD TOLD PRESS ISRAEL WOULD HAVE NO OBJECTION TO UN FORCE ON LEBANESE
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SIDE OF LINE.

2. BOUTROS SAID THAT THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT HAD NOT YET DECIDED WHAT IF ANYTHING IT SHOULD DO ABOUT THE SOUTH. THERE ARE INTER-ARAB AND INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS TO THE PROBLEM (AS WELL AS THE INTERNAL) THAT HAVE TO BE STUDIED. NEVERTHELESS, HE SAID, HE WOULD BE VERY

INTERESTED IN KNOWING HOW THE USG THOUGHT AN OFFICIAL REQUEST FROM LEBANON FOR UN FORCES TO KEEP THE PEACE THERE WOULD BE RECEIVED. HE ASKED SPECIFICALLY: A) WHAT WOULD BE USG POSITION? B) WHAT DID WE THINK WOULD BE REACTION OF OTHER SECURITY COUNCIL MEMBERS? C) DID WE THINK A UN FORCE COULD BE EFFECTIVE? AND, D) ASSUMING REACTIONS WERE FAVORABLE, HOW FAST COULD AN APPROPRIATE UN FORCE BE ORGANIZED AND PUT IN PLACE? BOUTROS EMPHASIZED THAT HE WAS NOT REPEAT NOT MAKING AN OFFICIAL REQUEST BUT WAS RATHER SEEKING A PERSONAL AND PRELIMINARY INDICATION OF WHAT WE THOUGHT THE RESPONSE TO SUCH A REQUEST WOULD BE IF IT WERE MADE.

3. BOUTROS SAID HE WOULD BE LEAVING LEBANON ON MAR 3 FOR EIGHT DAYS TO ATTEND AFRO-ARAB CONFERENCE IN CAIRO. HE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE REACTION BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE IF POSSIBLE; OTHERWISE, HE ASKED THAT I HOLD DEPARTMENT'S REPLY UNTIL HIS RETURN OR UNTIL HE GOT IN TOUCH WITH ME.

4. COMMENT. I KNOW THAT DEPARTMENT'S REACTION WAS NEGATIVE WHEN LANE RAISED THE POSSIBILITY OF USING UN TROOPS IN SOUTH LEBANON SOME MONTHS AGO (REFTELS). HOWEVER, MILITARY SITUATION ON THE GROUND HAS NOW CHANGED AND CHRISTIAN FORCES, SUPPORTED BY ISRAELIS AND SOME LOCAL MUSLIMS SEEM WELL ON THE WAY TO ESTABLISHING A CORDON SANITAIRE FROM MT. HERMON TO THE SEA. ONCE THEY HAVE DONE SO, A UN FORCE MIGHT BE USEFUL IN MAINTAINING STABILITY IN THE AREA AND
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PREVENTING FURTHER FIGHTING BETWEEN PALESTINIANS AND CHRISTIANS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THIS IS NOT AN INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT AND WE ASSUME UN WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO INVOLVE ITSELF IN WHAT IS BASICALLY AN INTERNAL LEBANESE PROBLEM. I WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S REACTIONS ASAP.

5. NOTE: IN ANY DISCUSSIONS OF THIS QUESTION OUTSIDE USG, PLEASE DO NOT REPEAT NOT MENTION THAT BOUTROS HAS RAISED SUBJECT WITH US. HE DOES NOT WANT TO HAVE HIS OPTIONS PRE-EMPTED BY LEAK. NOR, FOR THAT MATTER, IS IT IN OUR INTEREST TO HAVE IT KNOWN THAT HE RAISED IT WITH US, BECAUSE PRESS WILL INEVITABLY ENGAGE IN UNHELPFUL SPECULATION ABOUT OUR RESPONSE.
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